

# **FIRE EXTINGUISHERS**

Everybody has seen fire extinguishers. Many people have them in their car, at home or at work. But not everyone understands them or knows how to work them. The Guam Fire Department would like for you to have a working knowledge of fire extinguishers. It could save your life or those whom you love.

Fire extinguishers are not designed to fight a large or spreading fire. Even against small fires, they are useful only under the right conditions.

An extinguisher must be large enough for the fire at hand. It must be available and in working order, fully charged. The operator should be familiar with the extinguisher so it won't be necessary to read directions during an emergency.

## **Buy Extinguishers Carefully**

A fire extinguisher should be "listed" and "labeled" by an independent testing laboratory such as FM (Factory Mutual) or UL (Underwriters Laboratory).

The higher the rating number on an A or B fire extinguisher, the more fire it can put out, but high-rated units are often the heavier models. Make sure you can hold and operate the extinguisher you are buying.

Remember that extinguishers need care and must be recharged after every use. Ask the dealer about the extinguisher and how it should be serviced and inspected. A partially used unit might as well be empty.

You may need more than one extinguisher in your home. For example, you may want an extinguisher in the kitchen as well as one in the garage or workshop. Each extinguisher should be installed in plain view near an escape route and away from potential fire hazards such as heating appliances.

# Types of Extinguishers

Fire extinguishers are labeled according to the type of fire on which they may be used. Fires involving wood or cloth, flammable liquids, electrical, or metal sources react differently to extinguishers. Using one type of extinguisher on the wrong type of fire could be dangerous and make matters even worse.

Traditionally, the labels A, B, C or D have been used to indicate the type of fire on which an extinguisher is to be used.

## **Type A Label**

A Type A label is in a triangle on the extinguisher. This extinguisher is used for ordinary combustibles such as cloth, wood, rubber and many plastics. These types of fire usually leave ashes after they burn. Type A extinguishers for Ashes.

## **Type B Label**

A Type B label is in a square on the extinguisher. This extinguisher is used for flammable liquid fires such as oil, gasoline, paints, lacquers, grease, and solvents. These substances often come in barrels. Type B extinguishers for Barrels.

## **Type C Label**

A Type C label is in a circle on the extinguisher. This extinguisher is used for electrical fires such as in wiring, fuse boxes, energized electrical equipment and other electrical sources. Electricity travels in currents. Type C extinguishers for Currents.

## **Type D Label**

A Type D label is in a star on the extinguisher. This extinguisher is used for metal fires such as magnesium, titanium and sodium. These types of fire are very dangerous and seldom handled by the general public. Type D for Don't get involved.

## **Pictograms**

Recently, pictograms have come into use on fire extinguishers. These picture the type of fire on which an extinguisher is to be used. For instance, a Type A extinguisher has a

pictogram showing burning wood. A Type C extinguisher has a pictogram showing an electrical cord and outlet. These pictograms are also used to show what not to use. For example, a Type A extinguisher will show a pictogram of an electrical cord and outlet with a big slash through it. In other words, don't use it on an electrical fire.

## Number Rating

Fire extinguishers also have a number rating. For Type A fires, a 1 would stand for 1 1/4 gallons of water, a 2 would represent 2 1/2 gallons, 3 would be 3 3/4 gallons of water, etc. For Type B and Type C fire, the number represents square feet. For example, 2 would be two square feet, 5 is five square feet, etc.

Fire extinguishers can also be made to extinguish more than one type of fire. For example, you might have an extinguisher with a label that reads 2A5B. This would mean this extinguisher is good for Type A fires with 2 1/2 gallon equivalence and it is also good for Type B fires with a 5 square feet equivalency. A good extinguisher to have in each residential kitchen is a 2A10BC fire extinguisher. You might also get a Type A for the living room and bedrooms and an ABC for the basement and garage.

## Using a Fire Extinguisher

There is a simple acronym to remember to operate most fire extinguishers - PASS. PASS stands for **P**ull, **A**im, **S**queeze and **S**weep.

**Pull** the pin at the top of the cylinder. Some units require the releasing of a lock latch or pressing a puncture lever.

**Aim** the nozzle at the base of the fire.

**Squeeze** or press the handle.

**Sweep** the contents from side to side at the base of the fire until it goes out.

Shut off the extinguisher and then watch carefully for a rekindling of the fire.

# When to Fight a Fire

You should fight a fire with a fire extinguisher only when all the following are true:

- ◆ Everyone has left or is leaving the building.
- ◆ The fire department has been called.
- ◆ The fire is small and confined to the immediate areas where it started such as in a wastebasket, cushion, small appliance, stove, etc.
- ◆ You can fight the fire with your back to a safe escape route.
- ◆ Your extinguisher is rated for the type of fire you are fighting and is in good working order.
- ◆ You have had training in use of the extinguisher and are confident that you can operate it effectively.
- ◆ Remember, if you have the slightest doubt about whether or not to fight the fire - DON'T. Instead, get out, closing the door behind you to slow the spread of the fire. You have one of the best fire departments in the world standing by ready to protect you. Let the professionals do their job.